INTERGENERATIONAL PRACTICE: MENTORING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

WENDY MARIE CUMMING-POTVIN & JUDITH A. MACCALLUM
Murdoch University

ABSTRACT. Aiming to elucidate the relationship between social capital and intergenerational practice within mentoring, this article presents data from a case study of the School Volunteer Program in Western Australia. Drawing on situated learning theory and the concept of community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), the discussion examines benefits and limitations of intergenerational practice. Results acknowledge the potential for intergenerational practice to build social capital for both mentees and mentors. However, further research is required to examine mentoring in school-based communities of practice where complex issues of power (see Bourdieu, 1985) may empower or restrict student voices.

LES PRATIQUES INTERGÉNÉRATIONNELLES : MENTORAT ET CAPITAL SOCIAL POUR LES COMMUNAUTÉS DE PRATIQUE DU 21E SIÈCLE

RÉSUMÉ. Avec pour objectif de clarifier les relations existant entre le capital social et les pratiques intergénérationnelles lors de mentorat, cet article présente les données tirées d'une étude de cas pilotée par le School Volunteer Program en Australie occidentale. S'inspirant de la théorie d'apprentissage situationnel et du concept de communauté de pratique (Lave et Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott et Snyder, 2002), les auteurs font l'examen des bénéfices et des limites des pratiques intergénérationnelles. Les résultats reconnaissent le potentiel des pratiques intergénérationnelles comme générateur de capital social à la fois pour les protégés et les mentors. Cependant, les auteurs suggèrent que de plus amples recherches soient effectuées pour analyser le mentorat dans le cadre de communautés de pratique en milieu scolaire où des problématiques complexes de pouvoir (voir Bourdieu, 1985) peuvent favoriser ou restreindre les voix étudiantes.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the twenty-first century, globalization, technology and urbanization have shifted many cultural and belief systems across the world, causing tension and widening the need for social cohesion (Hatton-Yeo, 2000). As numerous social factors such as increased life-expectancy and changing family structures are associated with a deepening disconnection between generations, calls within the Western world have multiplied for developing intergenerational practice

involving collaborative engagement of young people and older adults (Bernard & Ellis, 2004; Springate, Atkinson, & Martin, 2008). While younger and older generations are perceived as increasingly excluded in communities characterized by decreasing levels of cohesion, intergenerational practice has flourished as a practical solution to build social capital across Europe, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA).

The term social capital has been deemed controversial and ambiguous in its origins, definitions and applications (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Portes, 1998). Definitions of social capital in general revolve around resources and access to these resources. Portes argued that empirical literature has increasingly defined social capital as actors' ability to secure benefits for themselves and others from memberships in social networks or other structures (see also Chase & Nording Christensen, 2008; Lesser & Prusak, 2000). Bourdieu's 1985 definition of social capital focuses on issues of power in relation to resources or potential resources in networks of relationships and mutual recognition. According to Portes, Coleman's work (1988, 1990) also provided useful descriptions of diverse and contradictory processes related to social capital, such as nuances involved in receiving resources, which may be defined as gifts, from the recipient's perspective. DeFilippis (2001) argued that contemporary interest in social capital for community development, which is based on Putnam's work (1995, 1996, 2000), highlights positive effects of social capital in civil society, and should be revisited to better understand controversial issues of power in the production of communities.

In the context of intergenerational practice, social capital has been typically described as the resources of networks, norms or shared values to which individuals have access as community members (Balatti & Falk, 2002; Kerka, 2003). To develop communities that value all citizens' contributions, considerable support has been given to a holistic perspective of intergenerational practice. In the UK, *The Strategy for Older People in Wales: A Strategy for Intergenerational Practice in Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008) aims to embed intergenerational practice in an integrated approach whereby communities, citizens and government ensure that younger and older people are an integral part of society. Similarly, a *Background Paper for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister* (Pain, 2005) argues that because younger and older people are vital to sustainable communities, governments at all levels must tackle age discrimination and actively engage older and young people in community planning. With increasing interest in intergenerational programs over the past decade in the USA, there have been calls to create policy responding to the needs of younger and older people and reflecting the interdependency of both groups (Calhoun, Kingson & Newman, 1997). More recently, USA government agencies established policies calling for intergenerational approaches to implement services for children, youth, older people, families and communities (Kaplan, Larkin & Hatton-Yeo, 2009).

Similarly, in Australia, due to the ageing population and changing nature of family structures and lifestyles (Feldman & Seedman, 2005), a major societal challenge is re-conceptualizing the relationship between younger and older community members. Despite the implementation of numerous intergenerational projects, the publication of the background paper *National Strategy for an Ageing Australia* (Bishop, 1999) and the acknowledgment that more formal intergenerational programs are related to life-long learning and broader social purposes (see Hanks & Icenogle, 2001), the concept of intergenerational practice is still not firmly anchored in Australian society (MacCallum, Palmer, Wright, Cumming-Potvin, Northcote, Brooker, & Tero, 2006). In order to investigate conceptual notions of intergenerational practice in relation to increasingly popular youth-adult practical programs, the *National Youth Affairs Research Scheme* (NYARS) commissioned a research project, to examine intergenerational exchange for building community capacity in the Australian setting.

The present article explores intergenerational practice in school-based settings to better understand the relationship between social capital and learning in these types of programs. By examining data from the case study of the *School Volunteer Program* constructed in the NYARS project, the analysis draws on situated learning theory and the concept of community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) to highlight the benefits and limitations of mentoring partnerships and intergenerational practice for mentors, mentees and the broader community.

DEFINING INTERGENERATIONAL PRACTICE: AIMS, APPROACHES AND SETTINGS

Numerous researchers argue that because intergenerational practice connotes a variety of approaches, a universally accepted definition does not exist (Granville, 2002; MacCallum et al., 2006; Raynes, 2004; Springate et al., 2008). Nonetheless, UNESCO researchers Bostrum, Hatton-Yeo, Ohsako, and Sawano (2000) recommended a commonly understood international definition, referring to intergenerational practice as programs sharing vision and exchanging purposeful learning and resources among older and younger generations. Aiming to promote respect, social inclusion and greater understanding between generations, a popular approach to intergenerational practice involves building on positive resources which different generations can offer each other and communities (Bernard & Ellis, 2004). In the UK context, Pain (2005) described intergenerational practice as small scale, intensive projects whereby older and younger people converge around shared activities. Generally, these interventions aim to enrich intergenerational relations; specific objectives vary and can include promoting social inclusion, health and well-being, cultural understanding and education.

While the aims of intergenerational practice commonly relate to promoting well-being, changing negative attitudes and increasing community cohesion

(Hatton-Yeo, 2000; Springate et al., 2008), the settings are diverse, including child care centres, churches, synagogues, libraries and schools. Intergenerational approaches in school settings tend to harbour the strengths of one generation to meet the needs of another (Kaplan, 2001). For example, civic-minded senior adults may contribute to the education of children with the aim of making a difference to their lives. Alternatively, children may bring energy and enthusiasm to support the lives of seniors. To promote students' connectedness to communities, academic success and positive interaction between older and younger people, one of the most popular school-based approaches involves mentoring.

The term mentoring has been regularly defined and described in the literature as involving relationships developed over time through formal or informal programs. Rhodes (2002) defines mentoring as the relationship developed between a more experienced, older adult and an unrelated younger protégé whereby the mentor provides guidance, instruction and encouragement. Hamilton and Darling (1996) define mentoring as a structured form of social support in which the mentor imparts knowledge and models socially accepted behaviours for the mentee. Flaxman and Ascher (1992) argue that the aim of mentoring is to provide assistance during a transition period, such as from childhood to adolescence or during an apprenticeship, so that the mentee gains expertise, social learning and mastery over everyday practices. Mentors may be teachers, other adults or peers from a youth's community; however, the mentoring relationship is different from the teacher-student relationship in that its basis involves developing trust and closeness (Buckley & Zimmermann, 2003; Hamilton & Darling, 1996; Yeh et al., 2007). There is the assumption in these multiple definitions that the mentor is generally older, more experienced and wiser than the mentee, and hence has access to resources.

MENTORING IN SCHOOL SETTINGS: OBJECTIVES, BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS

Over the past decade, school-based mentoring programs have emerged as an increasingly popular means of formal mentoring (see Herrera et al., 2007) with benefits being reported over a number of years. Randolph and Johnson (2008) suggest that the rise of formal mentoring in North American school settings is due to a variety of factors, such as educational practitioners' increased accountability for student learning and reduced funding for non-academic programs, making relatively low-cost mentoring programs an attractive option. Converse and Lignugaris/Kraft (2009) describe the objectives for school-based mentoring programs as ranging from preventing drop out, improving student attitudes toward school and increasing academic grades (see also King et al., 2002; Tierney & Grossman, 1995). On the other hand, Hopkins (2000) argues that due to lifestyle changes, children are less likely to interact with older

adults and school-based mentoring programs provide opportunities to bring the generations together.

Although studies focusing on in-depth evaluation of school-based mentoring programs have not been extensive, some North American researchers have employed a variety of research methods to disseminate results about successful mentoring relationships. Ryan, Whittaker, & Pinckney (2002) evaluated a New York based elementary mentoring program *Kennedy Kids and Adults Together* and discussed its successful characteristics. Qualitative results indicated that school staff members were gratified by the value which teachers, mentors, students and families placed on time spent in the mentoring program. Although the various actors had slightly different perceptions of the program, they agreed that the one-on-one relationship allowed for uninterrupted and regular attention whereby the mentor could observe the mentee's individual progress and offer encouragement. Similarly, in a Canadian study focused on mentor-supported literacy development, Hart, Ellis, and Small-McGinley (1998) collaborated with two elementary schools to implement a program whereby adult mentors spent one hour per week reading and carrying out literature activities with child mentees. Results indicated that children and mentors experienced their relationships in a positive and appreciative way. Mentors' qualitative narratives also demonstrated concern and attention to the children's vocabulary development, comprehension and engagement in reading.

More recently, Converse and Lignugaris/Kraft (2009) investigated the impact of an 18 week mentoring program on at-risk junior high school students in terms of attitudes toward school, unexplained absences and office referrals. Conclusions indicated that those mentors who generally responded positively to interview statements reported fewer office referrals for mentees and more relaxing mentoring sessions than other mentors, who appeared to question the impact of the program. The findings of this study support the conclusions of several researchers who cite indicators of successful mentoring relationships as incorporating flexibility, including active listening and mentee-initiated activities (see Grossman & Gary, 1997; Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002) rather than a regimented mentor-driven approach. These research studies suggest that the relationships formed between mentor and mentee have potential for mutual benefit and development of social capital.

Reviewing formal mentoring programs in Education and other professions, Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent (2004) concluded that despite limitations such as mentors' lack of time or personality mismatches, mentoring appears to offer great benefits for mentors and mentees. In many studies reviewed, mentoring provided satisfaction and emotional support; benefits for both parties included improved skills, access to new ideas and personal growth. Specifically, in the field of Education, the authors concluded that the mentoring process provides a vehicle for facilitating reflection, particularly on the part of mentors, who

wish to improve their professional practice. Despite the growing recognition that mentoring may be helpful for academic support and the development of relationships between students and community members, Randolph and Johnson (2008) concluded that more information is needed to fully understand how school-based mentoring programs operate and how participants benefit.

A FRAMEWORK FOR EXAMINING MENTORING AS INTERGENERATIONAL PRACTICE: COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Much of the literature on mentoring and intergenerational practice is situated in a framework of program effectiveness and pragmatic considerations, without a strong theoretical underpinning. Situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), which is influenced by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986, 1978), provides a framework to discuss the benefits and limitations of intergenerational practice for both mentees and mentors in *School Volunteer Program*. Representing the view that learning is constructed and negotiated from social experiences, sociocultural theorists such as Vygotsky have argued since the 1920s that children evolve and learn from their social environment in a manner that is first social, then egocentric and finally internal. More recently, since the 1990s, Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning has emerged in the field of Education as a helpful entry point for researchers to understand the social and situational aspects of learning, in particular through the concept of community of practice (see Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002).

Although situated learning theory has been widely recognized as an alternative to cognitive learning theories, Handley, Sturdy, Fincham and Clark (2006) argued that some conceptual issues lack development in the literature. While Lave and Wenger (1991) implied that full participation in a community of practice consists of gaining understanding through growing involvement, Roberts (2006) remarked that peripheral members may not necessarily develop beyond a position of peripheral participation in a broader organizational context. Although Lave and Wenger noted the role of power in shaping participation, Roberts contended that the authors failed to adequately explore the implications of power distribution. In addition, Roberts suggested that as the concept of community of practice developed (see Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2002), the authors failed to identify distinguishing principles between small groups of people working in close proximity and those working in large globally distributed communities. Aligned with Roberts' statements regarding scale and applicability, researchers such as Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) also critiqued the term community of practice for being ambiguous in the writing of Lave and Wenger.

Despite the fore-mentioned limitations, the concept of communities of practice, which was originally developed by Lave & Wenger (1991) and defined cultural participation as a condition for developing knowledge, remains helpful for in-

vestigating how mentees and mentors develop understandings through complex interactions to build social capital. Although the concept has been popular since Classical Greece and the Middle Ages, contemporary communities of practice are distinguished as people primarily interacting within larger organizations, rather than working by themselves (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Wenger (1998) and Wenger et al. (2002) defined a community of practice as a group of people who share a number of characteristics, such as concern or passion about a topic, on-going interaction to deepen knowledge about a topic and mutual negotiation of learning. Thus, while learning within a broader institution, members of a community of practice negotiate their actions, behaviours, meanings and artifacts used in relationships. Because individuals are often simultaneously members of several communities of practice, Wenger (1998) described communities of practice as ubiquitous across multiple settings.

Learning, argued Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), is integrated with other life-sustaining social activities; thus a situated theory of learning negates the assumption held in many institutions that learning is separated from other activities and involves an individual process with a beginning and end. Rather, Wenger defined the concept of situated learning as effectively participating with others to master the understandings and skills required in a community. Because the nature of knowledge is also situated, Wenger suggested that it is underpinned by assumptions such as: humans are social beings, knowledge involves competence in terms of valued enterprises, knowing means participating to pursue such enterprises and learning should produce meaning linked to humans' ability to experience. Highlighting the social reality of learning, situated learning theory in organizations should also consider formal and informal planes, particularly when newcomers are inducted through immersion across the full community (Paré & Le Maistre, 2006), which could assist in clarifying ambiguities in the concept of community of practice.

THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT: THE NATIONAL YOUTH AFFAIRS RESEARCH SCHEME AND THE SCHOOL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

With the escalating popularity of intergenerational practice for assisting young people to become better connected in the twenty-first century, the Australian Commonwealth Government initiated a series of research studies, which focussed on intergenerational programs such as mentoring in schools with community members and mentoring in Aboriginal communities (see MacCallum & Beltman, 1999, 2002; MacCallum et al., 2005). More recently, the *National Youth Affairs Research Scheme* (NYARS), commissioned an Australian study to explore intergenerational exchange for building community capacity. Summarized in the report *Community Building Through Intergenerational Exchange Programs* (MacCallum et al., 2006), the research project designated several aims, such as defining intergenerational practice, identifying the benefits and challenges of implementing intergenerational programs and exploring the potential for

intergenerational programs to foster resilience, enhance social cohesion and build community capacity.

To achieve the Project's aims, diverse qualitative methods were employed, such as: reviewing pertinent literature, consulting participants via focus groups and semi-structured interviews, observing selected field sites and constructing four case studies. Located across a range of settings in Australia, the case studies of intergenerational programs involved: the *Bankstown Oral History Project* in Sydney's inner western suburbs (New South Wales), the *Radio Holiday Project* run by Big hART in rural and remote Tasmania, the *Yiriman Project*, based in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia (WA) and the *School Volunteer Program*, based in Perth, WA's capital city. To explore mentoring in school-based settings, this article focuses exclusively on the case study of the *School Volunteer Program (SVP)*.

Aiming to promote intergenerational practice between young people and volunteer mentors, who are mainly seniors or retired citizens, the *SVP* is a national, non-profit organization focussing on school-based mentoring. Originating in WA, by 2005 *SVP* was offered or being established in other states, such as Victoria, Queensland, ACT, Tasmania and New South Wales (The School Volunteer Program Inc., 2005). In WA, the *SVP* has expanded to include over 2000 registered mentors, who assist approximately 3500 young people from years K-12 in 217 schools, state-wide (http://www.svp.org.au/overview.html).

Initially, the *SVP* focussed on mentors offering academic support to students who were identified as challenged by the school curriculum. However, as the needs of students became increasingly complex due to evolving family structures, the role of mentors was adapted to support students more broadly in terms of improving life skills and self-esteem (MacCallum et al., 2006). While the vast majority of volunteer mentors are aged over 50, and match the traditional view of the mentor, mentors can range in age from 16 to 90 years old, and work with young people, who are selected by school staff as potentially benefiting from a caring and non-threatening mentoring relationship (http://www.svp.org.au/overview.html). The most popular, or core program involves a mentor interacting with a student on a one-to-one basis for at least ten weeks (one school term).

To become a school volunteer, potential mentors must adhere to the WA Department of Education and Training's policies and procedures (www.svp.org.au). The process involves obtaining police clearance, complying with current Working With Children legislation and attending a three-hour orientation workshop. For a weekly period of one hour during school hours, mentoring sessions take place on the School site, generally in the library or a quiet area, where the mentor may assist the student with homework or simply engage in informal conversation during which both parties share their experiences and interests. As the student may be faced with a challenging home situation, the

volunteer mentor is encouraged to demonstrate patience and empathy when interacting with the young person (MacCallum et al., 2006).

BENEFITS OF THE SCHOOL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM: REDUCING BARRIERS, INCREASING SKILLS AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES

MacCallum et al. (2006) observed that multiple benefits were derived from intergenerational practice across four case studies in diverse Australian states. Notably, in relation to the *SVP*, during focus groups and interviews, young people and program staff frequently recounted positive aspects of the mentoring sessions, such as reducing intergenerational barriers; by sharing stories, mentees and mentors dispelled stereotypes, which ultimately lead to the development of friendships. For example, a year 8 student commented on the process of dispelling stereotypes about older people:

> Usually people might think it would be strange to have like an older person around you; but (um) it feels normal to be around them, not just weird or something like that.

Using adjectives such as 'strange' and 'weird', the year 8 student articulated the popular perception that older and younger generations have become increasingly disconnected in the Western world (see Bernard & Ellis, 2004; Springate, et al., 2008).

A year 10 student also described meetings with his mentor, using language which intimated the reduction of intergenerational barriers. In the following passage, it can be argued that by identifying the process of sharing stories, the student evoked the notion of enhanced understanding of self and 'other':

> I think they (older people) might get to understand younger people a little bit better because they just get to talk to them and just chat about how their life is and things like that...like what they think of it...

Here, the student's perceptions focussed on the strong connections between having open conversations and learning to understand oneself and the 'other'. In relation to social capital, Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) described the notion of learning about oneself and the 'other' as identity resources, which facilitate people's willingness to act for the benefit of the community.

As another year 10 student described the conversations in which he and his mentor engaged, the theme of sharing stories re-emerged:

> When they talk to us you learn lots about other things you don't know, you learn lots of stuff from them, like how to behave, how to talk to adults and all that... she told me about her husband. He died a few years ago because of the nerves thingee (motor neuron disease)... and she said that every morning when she looked in the mirror she could see her husband and she talked to him a lot... and she'd always get upset when she talked about it.

When she discussed the death of her husband with her mentee, the volunteer mentor used vivid images, suggesting that she felt comfortable engaging in this personal, sad and meaningful topic of conversation. The use of the adverb "always" suggests that the pair's routine meetings over time encouraged sharing of significant personal stories and an empathetic response on the part of the student.

Later in the focus group, when the student re-visited the theme of sharing stories, he pointed to the special relationship he had developed with his mentor:

> You can say stuff that you want to say but you can't say anywhere else... you can speak to them (the mentor) as a friend, not a teacher... like you do have to behave but it's not like you have to sit down and sit next to them at the board or something.

The pair's friendship was characterized by trust, for the student could seemingly broach any number of topics with his mentor. Generally used to identify positive elements as humans engage in social networking, the concept of trust is crucial to social capital approaches which highlight the strengthening of civic levels to unite community members (see Preece, 2004; Putnam, 2000). In these extracts, it could be argued that both mentor and mentee were empowered to share their stories and receive the gift of knowledge and experience from the other.

From a perspective of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), when mentees and mentors came together in the *SVP*, they learned from each other by sharing knowledge and experiences through mutual engagement in a community of practice. As the mentoring relationships developed through social participation, the learning that took place can be better understood by drawing on several of Wenger's (1998) interrelated components. For example, over time, the mentees and mentors interacted with dialogue to experience their lives and the world as meaningful. The routine practices themselves can also be described as offering scaffolding or assistance (see Bruner, 1983), allowing the mentees and mentors to sustain their active engagement through shared historical and social resources. Finally, as the mentees and mentors shared their stories, their discussions about learning created and re-created their personal histories or identities within communities of practice.

Data gathered during focus groups also pointed to community building aspects of the *SVP*, which involved benefits for both parties in the mentorship. Here, it can be argued that intergenerational practice leads to the mentor and mentee gaining knowledge and understandings as well as direct skills, which could be shared with the wider community. For example, one year 10 student commented:

> ...I'm working on a bike, I'm building a bike... he (the volunteer mentor) just tells me what he knows about it and how when he was my age it was just

> a fixed wheel and stuff like that, instead of tricky stuff, and how he had to work on it to be able to ride it every day.

It appeared that during the *SVP* activities, these types of meaningful moments allowed older mentors to share their knowledge and renewed enthusiasm with younger mentees, resulting in mutual benefits for the partnership.

Whilst core activities of the *SVP* involved older mentors providing support to younger, less experienced mentees, the situation was reversed in the *Computer Links* program, whereby high school students assisted older people to gain knowledge and skills about computers. During these sessions, which took place in high school settings, young people lead diverse activities, which modeled important skills to assist older members of the community. This program reverses the traditional concept of the mentor as older and has the potential to shift the power relationships. Still, it could be argued that benefits for the partnerships were mutual. In the following extract taken from observational notes of a Computer Links class, the researcher described the atmosphere as supportive and respectful. As year 11 and 12 students studying in the Vocational English stream assisted senior citizens to use computers, the high school students appeared comfortable with their older partners and informal interaction flowed easily and respectfully:

> The seniors had a booklet, which was prepared by the School Volunteer Program. The booklet was followed in a variety of ways, from religiously to flexibly, depending on the seniors' needs. For example, one partnership decided to concentrate on 'word', because the senior really needed more time with this program.... I noticed another female-male partnership also concentrating on the use of publisher. The young male student was extremely patient and supportive with his student. He spoke gently in a steady stream of suggestions, and really gave the student enough time to execute the tasks, prior to repeating instructions. He never appeared to intervene by "taking over the mouse."

As mentors and mentees engaged over time in this series of six computer-linked lessons, it can be suggested that members of the partnerships scaffolded each other to participate in authentic dyads within a community of practice. Such scaffolding relates to a major function of social capital, which Portes (1998) described as a benefit emanating from extra-familial networks (see Bourdieu, 1980).

The following comment drawn from the Program Manager's interview also emphasized how such sessions promoted computer skills in older mentees while creating a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem for young mentors:

> ...it's also benefiting the young people who are teaching them (the older people) on a one-to-one basis because it builds their self esteem by showing that 'gee they know something more than this older person knows....

This perception extends the results of Hart, Ellis and Small-McGinley (1998), indicating that time with mentors made young mentees happy and supported their self-esteem.

DISCUSSION: BENEFITS, CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF SITUATED LEARNING IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

In practical terms, the theory of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) offers explanations about how social interactions played out specifically in the *SVP*, and generally in Australian intergenerational practice to produce many benefits for participants (see MacCallum et al., 2006). For younger people, who shared stories and activities through a mentoring relationship, benefits included development of practical skills and increased school attendance and access to adults during challenging times. Key psychological and social benefits included encouraging optimism, building strength and resilience, gaining respect for the achievements of older people, learning about the history and stories of others and being exposed to differences. Similarly, for older people, key psychological and social benefits included building strength and resilience and being exposed to differences. However, some key benefits unique to the older people involved passing on traditions such as language and culture, reflecting on earlier life experiences and developing new technology skills. Young people, on the other hand, also appeared to benefit from an increased sense of civic and community responsibility. In these instances, sharing stories appeared to empower both the mentee and the mentor.

From a case study perspective, as mentoring pairs mutually engaged in on-going activities involving situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) benefits were produced for the SVP community of practice. For example, partnerships in the SVP alluded to the development of trust, which Lesser & Prusak (2000) identified as a key characteristic for building social capital in communities of practice. Kerka (2003) argued that individuals who are able to draw on social capital resources and relationships have enhanced life opportunities; on a broader level, communities which are characterized by strong trust and social networks benefit from collective action and cooperation. Summarizing key benefits to the broader community of practice, MacCallum et al. (2006) identified building social networks, breaking down barriers and stereotypes, modeling civic skills and encouraging volunteerism, which represent outcomes associated with the development of social capital.

While communities of practice have been linked to knowledge creation and sharing through social capital development on structural, relational and cognitive levels (see Lesser & Prusak, 2000), a compelling reason to re-consider intergenerational practice in relation to communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) lies in the unequal distribution of positive social capital, which can produce exclusion and disadvantage through negative so-

cial capital (Bostrom, 2002; Kerka, 2003). Although the literature generally accepts the benefits emanating from intergenerational practice (Ehrich et al., 2004; MacCallum et al., 2006), challenges and limitations exist regarding its impact and implementation, particularly in school settings. Evidence from the SVP study suggests relatively equal distribution of positive social capital, but the participants were selected by the program organizers and may not be representative of the experiences of all participants in the program.

Despite a wealth of anecdotal evidence about the benefits of intergenerational practice, additional research is required to document approaches, theoretical frameworks and impacts of such programs (see Kaplan, 2001; Ryan et al., 2002; Springate et al., 2008). Some researchers suggest that the evaluation research is often faulty and ambiguous (Dubois et al., 2002) and does not provide significant results to support the efficacy of school-based mentoring on students' drop out rates, academic progress and self-esteem (Lee, 1999; Long, 1997).

On a practical level, MacCallum et al. (2006) cited operational challenges, such as recruiting people to participate in intergenerational programs and renewing leadership through succession planning. More fundamentally, the emergence of a 'risk management' culture to create protective environments in Western societies (Singh, 2004) presents considerable challenges for implementing intergenerational practice (MacCallum et al., 2004). Consequently, policy makers and managers are often forced to constrain the number and nature of activities or settings to adequately address 'duty of care' issues (MacCallum et al., 2006). In the *SVP*, for example, after being screened through appropriate child protection policies, volunteer mentors must be also briefed in procedures to follow in cases whereby a mentee may report sexual or physical abuse. Contact between mentors and mentees outside the school context is strictly prohibited; mentoring sessions are only permitted on school premises and during school hours. In this way, the community of practice for school-based mentoring is bounded with specific rules of participation, which relate to a basic function of social capital involving social control (see Portes, 1998), and potentially limit the experiences and voices of mentors and mentees.

Despite the limitations and challenges associated with research examining intergenerational practice, a frequent justification for linking intergenerational practice to positive social capital is the reduction of stereotypes surrounding younger and older people and the enhancement of trust and understanding (see Kerka, 2003). While traditionally the source of an individual's social capital has been the family, over the past fifty years, social factors, such as increased life expectancy, evolving family structures and an age-segregated society, have worked against the creation of positive social capital (Bostrom, 2002). In a modern-day context of reduced civic participation, further consideration should be given to using intergenerational practice to build positive social capital through mutual acceptance of obligations, exchange of ideas and actions for

the common good (see Schuller et al., 2002). Reviewing intergenerational practice in the UK, Granville (2002) argued that intergenerational activity has the capacity to build social capital through the creation of community networks and support systems.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the Australian context, as mentors and mentees learned together, it can be argued that the *SVP* created social capital or "glue" to bond a "community of practice" (see Preece, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Wenger, 1998); this richness in social capital is characteristic of communities of practice where members help each other, communicate well and contribute to the common good. Despite the presentation of data supporting this argument, limits of the current research project were imposed by a case study approach, which focused on one school-based mentoring program in several school sites and selected participants. Hence, caution when interpreting results for wider contexts is required. Future research is recommended, particularly ethnographic studies, which could investigate school-based communities of practice to deepen our knowledge of how intergenerational practice links to educational theory and impacts in a long-term manner, on various stakeholders, such as mentees, whose views are often neglected.

While the notion that participation in groups may produce positive consequences for individuals and groups dates back to Classical Greece (see Wenger and Snyder, 2000), researchers such as Portes (1998) and De Filippis (2001) suggest that community development researchers, policy makers and practitioners' recent enthusiasm for social capital is misguided and should acknowledge the disadvantages of social capital. For school-based intergenerational mentoring, such as the *SVP*, it is essential that policy makers, program coordinators and mentees remain vigilant about the powers of socialization in school settings on micro, meso and macro levels. To investigate the structural, relational and cognitive aspects of communities of practice (see Lesser and Prusak, 2000), De Filippis (2001) argued that Bourdieu's (1985) definition of social capital is particularly useful, because it attempts to explicitly understand divisions based on power relations.

Numerous researchers, including Roland (2008) and Manzer (1994) have argued that schools retain a dual capacity in relation to social capital. On the one hand, a student may be given opportunities to increase self-esteem and develop academic skills. On the other hand, schools can also silence individuals by excluding those actors who possess social capital considered to be "non-mainstream." Due to their dual capacity of empowering or restricting learning, attitudes and relationships in communities of practice, school-based mentoring programs should be designed around principles of citizenship, such as honesty, integrity and compassion. In the migratory and technological society of the

twenty-first century, positioning such programs strategically to encourage collaboration and citizenship between local and global communities of practice (see Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) is also imperative.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge all participants as well as the researchers and research assistants involved in the NYARS funded 2006 intergenerational study.

NOTE

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not reflect the official position of NYARS.

REFERENCES

Balatti, J., & Falk, I. (2002). Socioeconomic contributions of adult learning to community: A social capital perspective. *Adult Education Quarterly, 52*(4), 281-298.

Bernard, M., & Ellis, S. (2004). *How do you know that intergenerational practice works? A guide to getting started on evaluating intergenerational practice.* Stoke-on-Trent, UK: The Beth Johnson Foundation.

Bishop, B. (1999). *The national strategy for an ageing Australia. Background paper* AGPS, Canberra, ACT Australia.

Bostrom, A. (2002). Informal learning in a formal context: Problematizing the concept of social capital in a contemporary Swedish context. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 21*(6), 510-524.

Bostrum, A., Hatton-Yeo, A., Ohsako, T., & Sawano, Y. (2000). A general assessment of IP initiatives in the countries involved. In A. Hatton-Yeo & T. Ohsako (Eds.), *Intergenerational programmes: Public policy and research implication: An international perspective*, (pp 3-8). The UNESCO Institute for Education & The Beth Johnson Foundation.

Bourdieu, P. (1980). Le capital social: notes provisoires. *Actes Rech.* Sci. Soc. 31, 2-3.

Bourdieu, P. (1985). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, pp. 241-258. New York: Greenwood.

Bruner, J. (1983). *Child's talk: Learning to use language.* New York: Norton.

Buckley, M., & Zimmermann, S. (2003). *Mentoring children and adolescents: A guide to the issues.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Calhoun, G., Kingson, E., & Newman, S. (1997) Intergenerational programs and public policy: A context for growth and change. In S. Newman, C. Ward, T. Smith, J. Wilson, & J. McCrea, with G. Calhoun & E. Kingson (Eds.), *Intergenerational programs: Past, present and future* (pp 143-159). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis

Chase, R., & Nording Christensen, R. (2008). Building social capital. In G. Tinggaard & G. Lind Hasse Svendsen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on social capital: The troika of sociology, political science and economics* (pp. 428-444). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc.

Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 95-121.

Coleman, J. (1990). *Foundations of social theory*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Converse, N., & Lignugaris/Kraft, B. (2009). Evaluation of a school-based mentoring program for at-risk middle school youth. *Remedial and Special Education, 30*(1), 33- 46.

DeFilippis, J. (2001). The myth of social capital in community development. *Housing Policy Debate, 12*(4), 781- 806.

Dubois, D., Holloway, B., Valentine, J., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A multi-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 30*, 157-197.

Ehrich, L., Hansford, B., & Tennent, L. (2004). Formal mentoring programs in education and other professions: A review of the literature. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*, 518- 540.

Falk, I., & Kilpatrick, S. (2000). What is social capital? A study of interaction in a rural community. *Sociologia Ruralis, 40*(1), 87-110.

Feldman, S., & Seedsman, T. (2005). Ageing: New choices, new challenges. In M. Poole (Ed.), *Changing families, changing times* (pp 180-197). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Flaxman, E., & Ascher, C. (1992). *Mentoring in action: The efforts of programs in New York City.* Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Columbia University (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 354 291).

Granville, G. (2002). *A review of intergenerational practice in the UK*. Stoke-on Trent, UK: Beth Johnson Foundation.

Grossman, J., & Garry, E. (1997). Mentoring: *A proven delinquency prevention strategy.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Hamilton, S., & Darling, N. (1996). Mentors in adolescents' lives. In K. Hurrelmann & S. Hamilton (Eds.), *Social problems and social contexts in adolescence: Perspectives across boundaries* (pp. 199-215). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Handley, K. Sturdy, A. Fincham, R., and Clark, T. (2006). Within and beyond communities of practice: Making sense of learning through participation, identity and practice. *Journal of Management Studies. 43*(3), 641-652.

Hanks, R., & Icenogle, M. (2001). Preparing for an age-diverse workforce: Intergenerational service-learning in social gerontology and business curricula. *Educational Gerontology, 27*(1), 49-70.

Hart, S., Ellis, J., & Small-McGinley, J. (1998). Mentor-supported literacy development in elementary schools. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 44*(2), 149-164.

Hatton-Yeo, A. (2000). Introduction. In A. Hatton-Yeo & T. Ohsako (Eds.), *Intergenerational programmes: Public policy and research implications an international perspective*. (pp. 1-2). The UNESCO Institute for Education & The Beth Johnson Foundation.

Herrera, C., Grossman, J., Kaub, T., Feldman, A., McMaken, J., & Jucovy, L. (2007). *Making a difference in schools*. Retrieved on 28/4/09 from http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/220_publication.pdf.

Hodkinson, H., & Hodkinson, P. (2004). Rethinking the concept of community of practice in relation to schoolteachers' workplace learning. *International Journal of Training and Development, 8*(1), 21- 31.

Hopkins, G. (2000). How important are intergenerational programs in today's schools? *Phi Delta Kappan, 82*(4), 317-320.

Jekielek, M. Moore, K. Hair, E., & Scarupa, H. (2002). *Mentoring: A promising strategy for youth development.* Washington, DC: Child Trends.

Kaplan, M. (2001). *School-based intergenerational programs*. Hamburg, Germany: UNESCO Institute for Education.

Kaplan, M., Larkin, E., & Hatton-Yeo, A. (2009). Leadership in intergenerational practice: In search of the elusive "P" factor-passion. *Journal of Educational Leadership*, 7(3), 69-81.

Kerka, S. (2003). *Intergenerational learning and social capital*. Erics, EDO-CE-03-244 Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.

King, K., Vidourek, R., Davis, B., & McClellan, W. (2002). Increasing self-esteem and school connectedness through a mulitdimensional mentoring program. *Journal of School Health, 72*, 294-299.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* New York: Cambridge University Press

Lee, J. (1999). The positive effects of mentoring disadvantaged students. *Professional School Counseling, 2*(3), 172-176.

Lesser, E. & Prusak, L. (2000). Communities of practice, social capital and organizational knowledge. In E. Lesser & M. Fontaine (Eds.), *Knowledge and communities* (pp 123-150). Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann

Long, J. (1997). The dark side of mentoring. *Australian Educational Research*, *24,* 115-123.

MacCallum, J., & Beltman, S. (1999). *Mentoring in schools by members of the community: International year of older persons mentoring research report.* Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. *DETYA Report No. 6562SCHP00A (ISBN 0 642 44876 0)* [156 pages]. Also available at http://www.detya.gov.au/schools/publications/index.htm.

MacCallum, J., & Beltman, S. (2002). *Role models for young people: What makes an effective role model program?* Report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. Hobart: ACYS. Also available at http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/youth-rmypw.htm.

MacCallum, J., Beltman, S., Palmer, D., Ross, C., & Tero, C. (2005). *Indigenous mentoring pilots project 2001-2004: National Evaluation Report.* Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

MacCallum, J., Palmer, D., Wright, P., Cumming-Potvin, W., Northcote, J., Brooker, M., & Tero, C. (2006). *Community building through intergenerational exchange programs.* Report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS). Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) on behalf of NYARS [129 pages]. Also available at: http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/youth-community_building.htm

Manzer, R. (1994). *Public schools and political ideas: Canadian educational policy in historical perspective.* Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto.

Pain, R. (2005). *Intergenerational relations and practice in the development of sustainable communities. Background paper for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.* Durham University, Stockton-on-Tees, United Kingdom: International Centre for Regional Regeneration and Development Studies (ICRRDS).

Paré, A., & Le Maistre, C. (2006). Distributed mentoring in communities of practice. In P. Tynjälä, J. Välimaa, & G. Boulton-Lewis (Eds.), *Higher education and working life: Collaborations, confrontations and challenges* (pp. 129-141). Amsterdam: Elsevier

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Reviews Sociology 24*(1), 1-24.

Preece, J. (2004). Etiquette, empathy and trust in communities of practice: Stepping stones to social capital. *Journal of Universal Computer Science*, *10*(3), 294-302.

Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy, 6*, 65-78.

Putnam, R. (1996). The strange disappearance of civic America. *American Prospect,* Winter, 34-48.

Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Randolph, K., & Johnson, L. (2008). School-based mentoring programs: A review of the research. *Children and Schools, 30*(30), 177- 185.

Raynes, N. (2004). Where are we now with intergenerational developments: An English perspective. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, *2*(3), 187-195.

Rhodes, J. (2002). *Stand by me: The risks and rewards of mentoring today's youth.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Roberts, J. (2006). Limits to communities of practice. *Journal of Management Studies, 43*(3), 623-639.

Roland, K. (2008). Educating for inclusion: Community building through mentorship and citizenship. *The Journal of Educational Thought. 42*(1), 53-68.

Ryan, S., Whittaker, C., & Pinckney, J. (2002). A school-based elementary mentoring program. *Preventing School Failure, 46*(3), 133-138.

Schuller, T., Brasset-Grundy, A., Green, A., Hammond, C., & Preston, J. (2002). *Learning, continuity and change in adult life. London: Wider benefits of learning research report 3*, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, University of London: London, England. Retrieved on 05/05/09 from http://www.learningbenefits.net/Publications/ResReps/ResRep3.pdf.

Singh, P. (2004). *Risk management Vs risk retreat: A case study of child protection policy carriage*. Paper presented at the AARE conference, University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Springate, I., Atkinson, M., & Martin, K. (2008). *Intergenerational practice: A review of literature. Local Government Association Research* Report F/SR262. Slough, Berkshire, UK: National Foundation for Educational Research

The School Volunteer Program Inc. (2005). *Members Newsletter*, 28, 1-8. March 2005, Chairman's Message.

The School Volunteer Program Inc. (2008) *Website, overview.* Retrieved on 26/4/09 from http://www.svp.org.au/newsletter.html.

Tierney, J., & Grossman, J. (1995). *Making a difference: An impact study*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language*. (translation of *Myshlenie i rech'*). Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Welsh Assembly Government: Llwodraeth Cynulliad Cymru (2008*). Strategy for older people in Wales: A strategy for intergenerational practice in Wales*. Wales: Welsh Assembly Government.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Synder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Wenger, E., & Snyder, W. (2000). Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier. *Harvard Business Review*. Reprint Number R00110. Copyright. 1999 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. pp 139-145.

Yeh, C., Ching, A., Okubo, Y., & Luthar, S. (2007). Development of a mentoring Program for Chinese Immigrant Adolescents' Cultural Adjustment. *Adolescence 42*(168), 733-747.

WENDY CUMMING-POTVIN was born and raised in Canada. Wendy was awarded a BA and an English/French teaching certificate at The University of British Columbia, a MA at l'Université de Montréal and a PhD at The University of Queensland, Australia. Wendy's research interests include promoting social justice, literacies, mentoring and on-line learning. Currently a member of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council research team investigating social justice and engineering education, Wendy aims to advance international and collaborative teaching and research communities.

JUDITH A. MACCALLUM is Dean of the School of Education at Murdoch University in Western Australia. Her research revolves around collaboration, motivation and mentoring from a sociocultural perspective. With colleagues Judith pioneered Australian research on mentoring and related strategies, such as intergenerational exchange. This research is highly regarded in Australia by government, industry and community organizations, and has been used as the basis for policy development and implementation at national, state and community levels.

WENDY CUMMING-POTVIN est née et a grandi au Canada. Elle a obtenu un baccalauréat en arts et un certificat en enseignement de l'anglais et du français à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique, une maîtrise en arts de l'Université de Montréal et un doctorat à l'Université Queensland en Australie. Ses intérêts de recherche englobent la justice sociale, les littératies, le mentorat et l'apprentissage en ligne. Wendy est actuellement membre d'une équipe de chercheurs du Australian Learning and Teaching Council explorant la justice sociale et la formation des ingénieurs. Elle cherche à favoriser le développement de communautés internationales et collaboratives d'enseignement et de recherche.

JUDITH A. MACCALLUM est rectrice à l'École des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université Murdoch située en Australie occidentale. Ses recherches gravitent autour de la collaboration, de la motivation et du mentorat dans une perspective socioculturelle. Collaborant avec des collègues, Judith a mis sur pied des projets de recherche sur le mentorat et des stratégies apparentées, comme les échanges intergénérationnels. En Australie, ses recherches sont tenues en haute estime par le gouvernement, l'industrie et les organisations communautaires. Elles sont utilisées comme fondement pour le développement et l'implémentation des politiques au niveau national, étatique et communautaire.